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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, May 11, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "SIZING CHILDREN'S GARMENTS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Some time ago our Washington correspondent told us about a nation-wide study of children's body measurements which the Bureau of Home Economics was then starting in cooperation with 15 states and the District of Columbia. Today's Washington letter picks up the story of that study, which is now completed.

As you may remember, about two years ago, the American Home Economics Association suggested to the American Standards Association that children's clothing and patterns should be standardized on some more satisfactory basis than age. It was pointed out that enormous losses in the garment trade are due to the return of poorly-fitting, unsatisfactory garments sold by age-size.

Ruth O'Brien, chief of the textile and clothing division of the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, was asked to direct a nation-wide cooperative study of children's actual body measurements as a basis for correct sizing. The study just completed included about 150,000 children from 4 to 17 years old,- both boys and girls. They lived in all parts of the country and were from families of all economic levels. Thirty-six different measurements were taken on each child, under the direction of specialists trained in measuring the human body. Now I'll read our Washington correspondent's letter, which reports the conclusions arrived at when all these measurements were tabulated and analyzed. She says:

"A few days ago Miss O'Brien spoke in New York City before a conference consisting of representatives of the American Standards Association and people from the clothing trade,- manufacturers and retailers,- and others interested in the problem of sizing. Miss O'Brien pointed out that build has been given but scant



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attention by manufacturers of children's and also women's clothing. True, we sometimes hear about "dresses for little women", "stylish stouts", and other terms that recognize physical differences. Men's shirts are sold by neck size and sleeve size together. If a man has short arms and a thick neck, he doesn't have to buy a giant sized shirt and have the sleeves cut down. He certainly doesn't buy an "18-year-old" shirt, or a "40-year-old" shirt. And mothers don't buy "9-year-old" shoes for little Johnnie. But in other children's garments, age-sizes are still used.

"As one of the workers on these measurements studies put it, we need two-dimensional measurements for sizing garments because we have two factors of body structure to consider,- the bony framework, which determines height principally, and the flesh on those bones, or breadth. If you know how tall a child is, and how large around he is at one or two points on his trunk, it is possible to make garments that will fit him. Or, put the other way around, if garments are made to fit all children of a certain height, and then sized for thin, medium, and thick bodied children, mothers can select clothing with greater assurance of a fit.

"The bureau now suggests that there are three possible groups of two body measurements each, and that any one of these combinations would provide a better way to size children's garments than the present hit-or-miss method of using age-sizes. Fitting garment to a child in the future should be just the reverse of the present proceeding. What we do now is to pick an age size corresponding to the child's age and see if it fits. Generally it doesn't. If one of the proposed combinations is used we can first measure our child.

"The three suggested combinations of two measurements are as follows:  
Height and girth of hips; height and girth of chest; or height and weight. The bureau doesn't attempt to say which should be adopted. That's a matter to be threshed out by the clothing manufacturers and retailers if the report as a whole appeals to these businessmen.





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"The first combination, - height and hip measure, is easy for any mother to take, just with a tape measure. Then when buying an outfit for her child, she could simply ask for that height and girth, just as we now ask for a pair of shoes of given length and width.

"Miss O'Brien said it was interesting to find that one belief of the garment trade had been verified by the figures collected, that children in the West are larger for their age than those in other sections. Also, children from more prosperous homes were consistently larger.

"This finding is supported by nutritionists, who say that people on the West Coast, who are able to get an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables cheaply most of the year, have a noticeably better diet than families in other sections of the country on comparable incomes. And it also ties in with reports that as income improves, family diet improves in nutrients. Food probably made a difference in those husky boys and girls in the West.

"However, I'm talking about clothing, not food. It was agreed at the New York conference that the measurement study was a long step in the right direction. The next step was a visit to Washington of some of the trade representatives to give the figures closer study. The final step will be the acceptance or rejection by the trade of these proposals for sizing children's garments in one of these three ways, by height and by breadth, as shown by hip measure, chest measure, or weight. I'll report on that decision later."

That concludes our Washington letter. The Bureau of Home Economics would be glad to hear from any of you who have opinions on this problem of sizing children's clothes. If you do or don't like the present system write to Miss Ruth O'Brien, Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., and express your opinion. Opinions of consumers do count.

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